

One Man's Obedience **Pastor Tom Hughes**

Today I want to challenge our church to depart from the endless wrangling that has divided our churches for so long, and humbly admit our sinfulness, claiming the righteousness of Christ as our only perfection. It is my hope that we will all come together in the unity of the faith concerning God's plan of salvation.

What the law demands is a lifetime of perfect obedience. Absolute perfection, by definition is a lifetime of perfect obedience. When Adam and Eve sinned, they only committed one sin, but they lost their home, and their souls and would have died, had not Jesus stepped in and literally saved them. They would have perished that very day, except for Christ's righteousness.

"The law requires us to present to God a holy character. It demands of men today just what it demanded of Adam in Eden.--perfect obedience, perfect harmony with all its precepts in all relations of life, under all circumstances and conditions. No unholy thought can be tolerated, no unlovely action can be justified. As the law requires that which no man of himself can render, the human family are found guilty before the great moral standard, and it is not in the province of law to pardon the transgressor of law. The standard of the law cannot be lowered to meet man in his fallen condition. No compromise can be made with the sinner to take less than the full requirement of the law. The law cannot acquit the guilty, it cannot cleanse the sinner, or give power to the transgressor to raise himself into a purer, holier atmosphere. Standing before a holy, good, and just law, and finding ourselves condemned because of transgression, we may well cry out, What shall we do to be saved?" {ST, May 30, 1895 par. 2}

So when you are converted, even if you lived a flawless life from then on, it would not be good enough. You cannot

manufacture a lifetime of absolutely perfect obedience. Only Christ can provide that for you! Thank God he has, the only man to ever live an absolutely perfect and flawless life from birth to death!

Romans 5:18, 19

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

It is by one man's obedience we are made righteous. There is not room in this text for two people! Only one. Not Jesus plus my obedience, or my sanctification, or my character development, or anything else! It is by one man's obedience, and one man's obedience alone that I am justified, and receive the free gift of eternal life! His life, death, and resurrection alone, without any other contribution, provide to me the free gift of eternal life. Another text that makes it totally clear is found in Hebrews the tenth chapter. ***Hebrews 10:14***

14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Christ's absolutely perfect life, and death on Calvary provides my only perfection. Notice it says we are perfected forever, by this one mighty offering. I can't add anything to it. It covers me, and God regards me as sinless as Jesus, even while I am "being" sanctified. This shows how it is God's grace, and the righteousness of Jesus alone that provides our "perfection" while we are going through the process of sanctification, which will continue right up until the day Jesus comes again.

"It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot

perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But

Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned." {SC 62.2}

Only through Christ can you be perfect. He went before you, and accomplished what you never can. All you can do is accept salvation as a free gift. The all-comprehensive transformation should be now according to the perfectionist's theory. But notice what the **27 Fundamentals** states: "Glorification and Perfection. Some incorrectly believe the ultimate perfection that glorification will bring is already available to humans. But of himself, Paul, that dedicated man of God, wrote near the end of his life, "not that I have already attained or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14).

Sanctification is a lifelong process. Perfection now is ours only in Christ, but the ultimate, all-comprehensive transformation of our lives of our lives into the image of God will take place at the Second Advent. Paul cautions: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Take heed lest ye fall. Glorification, and absolute perfection will only come at the

Second Advent. That is the teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist church. The churches official position is very clear.

Notice this statement from the Spirit of Prophecy

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matt. 5:48. {TMK 130.1} Christ presents before us the highest perfection of Christian character, which throughout our lifetime we should aim to reach. . . . Concerning this perfection Paul writes: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after. . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-15). . . . {TMK 130.2} How can we reach the perfection specified by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ--our Great Teacher? Can we meet His requirement and attain to so lofty a standard? We can, else Christ would not have enjoined us to do so. He is our righteousness. In His humanity He has gone before us and wrought out for us perfection of character. We are to have the faith in Him that works by love and purifies the soul." **That I May Know Him- Chap. 124 - Perfection Through Christ's Merits**

Some interpret absolute perfection as something we can achieve, earn or accomplish. They emphasize the WE CAN. Yes we can, but it is only by accepting what Christ had wrought out for us. He is our righteousness. By accepting his perfect character as ours by faith, we receive as a free gift, his perfection credited to our account and God accepts us as if we had never sinned. Note again:

"If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned." {SC 62.2}" See 1st John 1:9 we are cleaned of "ALL unrighteousness".

Paul had not attained perfection. No other person in the bible attained it, the bible says "All have sinned and come short". Remember, only a **LIFETIME of perfection** can meet the laws demands. Don't make the arm of flesh your trust.

Notice what EGW says about John the apostle and what he said just before his death:

*"We become changed into the image of that upon which we dwell...**John was not perfect; Peter denied his Lord; and yet it was of men like these that the early Christian church was organized.** Jesus accepted them that they might learn of Him what constitutes a perfect Christian character. The business of every Christian is to **study the character of Christ...It is not an uncommon thing to see imperfection in those who carry on God's work...Everything that causes us to see the weakness of humanity is in the Lord's purpose to help us to look to Him, and in no case put our trust in man, or make flesh our arm.**" TKH 182*

John was imperfect, and not just in the beginning. He regarded himself that way at the end of his life, when they attempted to kill him in boiling oil.

*"John declared... **I am only a weak, sinful man, but Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.** He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." John's words, while suffering at the hands of his enemies, had an influence, and **he was removed from the cauldron** by the very ones who cast him in. *Christ Triumphant* p. 312*

The Apostle Paul and John were not perfect, yet we are going to claim to be? I don't think that would be a wise course of action. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we see our own sinfulness. So the less perfect we will look in our own eyes. It's dangerous ground to mix in our own character development, or works into the salvation equation. It's

JESUS PLUS NOTHING! Once we are converted, we obey out of love. It's the fruit of our relationship to Jesus. We don't teach Roman Catholicism, that it's faith + works that save us. There is no absolute perfection apart from Christ. We need to look to Jesus and let Him change us into His image. We need to dwell on Him. Study His perfect character. We should not make our own flesh or that of others something to put our trust in. Christ is our only righteousness. He is the great pattern we should copy and imitate. That is our privilege, but we will never equal the pattern. Just because we don't deliberately sin, that does not mean we are not "sinful". We are sinful, as John said.

'Never can we equal the goodness and the love of Jesus, but he calls upon every man and woman, youth and child, to behold him, and by beholding his perfection of character, to become changed into his image. Call every talent into exercise to **copy** the Pattern". **ST, November 28, 1892 par. 7**

"Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability. When we fall, all helpless, suffering in consequence of our realization of the sinfulness of sin; when we humble ourselves before God, afflicting our souls by true repentance and contrition; when we offer our fervent prayers to God in the name of Christ, we shall as surely be received by the Father, as we sincerely make a complete surrender of our all to God. We should realize in our inmost soul that all our efforts in and of ourselves will be utterly worthless; for it is only in the name and strength of the Conqueror that we shall be overcomers.-- Review and Herald, Feb. 5, 1895. {YRP 369.3}

"Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. He wants our minds to be clear, our tempers sweet, our love unbounding. Then the peace that passeth knowledge will flow from us to bless all with whom we come in contact.

The atmosphere surrounding our souls will be refreshing. . . .” {SD 348.5}

But there is no need for us to be alarmed. She makes it clear that Christ’s perfection is on a far more exalted level than ours. Our perfection exists solely because of Him, and is really only a faint attempt to imitate, or reflect the absolute glory and majesty of Christ’s holiness. She understood that. So when you read her writings, encouraging you to strive for perfection, always remember to interpret her in context, remembering that our “perfection” as she means it is always relative, taking into account our abilities, faults and limitations. God is so wonderfully fair, and only wants us to be the best that we can be. He accepts our best efforts as loving obedience in Christ.

Jesus righteousness is so much more glorious, so much greater than even the noblest of men’s achievements that it’s blasphemy to even suggest that any human being could ever equal it. It’s greater than Moses, Paul, Peter, James, John, and all the great men of the Bible combined!

“The divine beauty of the character of Christ, of whom the noblest and most gentle among men are but a faint reflection...” IHP 63

“As God is holy in His sphere, so fallen man, through faith in Christ, is to be holy in his sphere. . . .” {CC 352}

“They will be in sympathy with Christ, and in their sphere, as they have ability and opportunity, will work to save perishing souls as Christ worked in His exalted sphere for the benefit of man. {3T 483.2}

Here we see Ellen White made a clear distinction between our sphere and Christ’s “exalted Sphere”. Moral and spiritual perfection is promised to everyone who will overcome by faith. We can live holy, Christ like lives, by His grace. But it would be blasphemous to suggest this “relative

perfection” can ever equal Christ’s absolute perfection. That’s why so many get confused and wander into perfectionism.

“The truth of Jesus Christ does not tend to gloom and sadness. . . . We must look away from the disagreeable to Jesus. We must love Him more, obtain more of His attractive beauty and grace of character, and cease the contemplation of others’ mistakes and errors. We should remember that our own ways are not faultless. We make mistakes again and again. . . . No one is perfect but Jesus. Think of Him and be charmed away from yourself, and from every disagreeable thing, for by beholding our defects faith is weakened. God and His promises are lost from sight. . . .” {TMK 136}

Could she be plainer? Speak more clearly? “Our ways are not faultless...No one is perfect but Jesus...by beholding our defects faith is weakened!

When we stare at our own spiritual bellybuttons, beholding our own faults and imperfections, we are actually weakening our faith. We must get our eyes off our own faults and the faults of others, and look to Jesus.

“Do not, because your thoughts are evil, cease to pray. If we could in our own wisdom and strength pray aright we could also live aright, and would need no atoning sacrifice. But Imperfection is upon all humanity...Christ stands before His Father saying, “Lay their sins on me. I will bear their guilt. They are my property. I have graven them upon the palms of my hands. “ IHP 78

Today I want to commend you for your willingness to study deeply. I really enjoy discussing these concepts, and hope you will consider my thoughts in the spirit of love. Please don’t ever be offended because we disagree. I appreciate your willingness to dialogue, and hope we will always be friends, even if it takes a long time to come

together on this issue. I think Ellen White summed up my feelings when she wrote:

“We may commit the keeping of our souls to God as unto a faithful Creator, *not because we are sinless, but because Jesus died to save just such erring, faulty creatures as we are*, thus expressing His estimate of the value of the human soul.” IHP 80

“The true penitent learns the uselessness of self importance. Looking to Jesus, comparing his own defective character with the Saviour’s perfect character, he says only-“In my hand no price I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling.” IHP 64

May we all come into the unity of the faith, standing only on the solid rock of Christ Our Righteousness, is my prayer. Abiding in Him, we shall bear much fruit!

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